



“The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained”, cover graphic

The Subject Lives

In the previous post we said that in the late 20th Century, irrational Post-Modernism became the house philosophy of Imperialism. Some declared the “Death of the Subject”, thereby denying the possibility of human free will, or agency.

[James Heartfield](#)’s 2002 book called “The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained” confronted the Post-Modernists. Among other things, this book helped inspire the Johannesburg Communist University that started in 2003. Heartfield kindly allowed the CU to use extracts from the book. Some of these are contained in today’s main linked document, below. The illustration above is from the cover of the book.

What Heartfield manages to do very excellently is to make clear the nature of “Post-Modernism” by contrasting it

polemically with the basic question of philosophy, which is the relationship between the human Subject (individual and collective) and the external, objective, material universe.

Post-modernism had flourished in the haze and half-light that was the consequence of “Western” bourgeois anti-communism, hardly challenged, and veiled in mystification and obfuscation.

Whereas outright fascism had promoted the “triumph of the will”, or in other words pure subjectivism, post-modernism became a prophecy of impotence and fatalism, also sometimes called determinism.

Heartfield showed that these trends (i.e. both pure objectivism and pure subjectivism), though each appeared to be opposite to the other, yet both amounted to the same thing, namely anti-humanism, which in our time is anti-communism.

The human being exists, and can only exist, in the meeting place of Subject and Object. This is the master dialectic. This is the site of production.

The first three pages of this document are a very brilliant explanation of the basis of society as it is in fact presently constructed around the freely willing human Subject. The following fifteen pages comprise a somewhat detailed account of the growth and the ramifications of post-modernism in the second half of the 20th Century.

In the fourteen years that have passed since the publication of Heartfield's book, it appears that the former ascendancy of post-modernism in the academy and in the intellectual community as a whole is now a thing of the past, and that the free-willing human Subjected has re-asserted itself. This coincides with the resurgence of Marxist thought and criticism in the world, of which Heartfield's book is an example.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Death of the Subject Explained Selection, 2002, Heartfield](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).